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Groups seek new roles for state's old barns



**Byron
Crawford**

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The Kentucky Trust for Historic Preservation and Historic Paris-Bourbon County are hoping to shine a new light on the old barns in the heart of Kentucky's tobacco and horse country during a conference and historic barn tour May 20 in Bourbon County.

"There's legislation that could really make a difference in this area," said Robert Polsgrove, president of the Trust for Historic Preservation. "Some of the states have gotten tax credits passed for farmers, and there is still some tobacco program development money out there that might be used to maintain or look at ways to reuse these barns."

Many of rural Kentucky's most distinctive cultural landmarks -- wooden tobacco barns -- are edging closer to the endangered list.

As production of burley tobacco, the state's longtime leading cash crop, declines and consolidates, thousands of aging tobacco barns are expected to fall into disuse and disrepair.

And preservationists are concerned that many will disappear over the next 10 years.



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This old barn is on the farm of Mary Goff Field in Bourbon County. (Courtesy of Gary Stansberry)

IF YOU GO

Anyone interested in attending the Historic Paris-Bourbon County Old Barn Conference and Tour on May 20 should call the conference's Kathy Carter at (859) 987-2606.

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husband own, including several early 20th century barns whose timbers are joined with wooden pegs.

"We figure if we can keep roofs on them, that's a big thing for saving them," said Kuster, who is helping coordinate the barn tour. "Some people come in here and look at them, even from the thoroughbred industry, and see them as an old barn to push down. That's a crying shame, because many of them have walnut and cherry and other valuable woods in them that could be used for other purposes."

Vera Wiltse, a Michigan State University extension agent and former president of the Michigan Barn Preservation Network, will share with the Bourbon County group ideas being developed by the Michigan preservationists and more than a dozen other state organizations in the National Barn Alliance.

"We have the English barns, the bank barns, dairy barns and hay barns -- but we don't have tobacco barns that I'm aware of though," said Wiltse. "Every barn is unique in some way because of its vernacular architecture."

Byron Crawford's column appears on the Metro page Sundays, Wednesdays and Fridays. You can reach him at (502) 582-4791 or e-mail him at bcrawford@courier-journal.com. You can also read his columns at www.courier-journal.com.

Polsgrove notes that some of Kentucky's abandoned livestock and tobacco barns are already being transformed into restaurants, art studios, shops and homes.

Bourbon County thoroughbred breeder Betsy Kuster, whose family has been involved in tobacco farming for several generations, has 10 tobacco barns on farms that she and her

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